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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/19/2016
TAGS: [KJUS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: A LOOK INSIDE THE ITAGUI-MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood.
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

11. (C) Sergio Caramagna, Director of the OAS Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP/OAS), told the Ambassador on December 15 he never imagined seeing the ex-paramilitary leaders "behind bars." Caramagna described Itagui maximum-security prison as dark, crowded, and dank. Now more than ever, he said, "the GOC had the upper-hand on the former paramilitaries, who were even more vulnerable than before." Caramagna said that since the ex-paramilitary leaders called off the peace process on December 6, the OAS, with the help of the Church and Antioquia's Peace Facilitator Commission, had met with them in an effort to preserve the process. Caramagna said several ex-paras told him they were ready to tell the truth through the Justice and Peace Law, but needed better security guarantees from the GOC. End summary.

Dynamics Within Itagui

12. (C) MAPP/OAS Director Sergio Caramagna told the Ambassador on December 15 he never imagined seeing the ex-paramilitary leaders "behind bars." The ex-paras always expected to be in a low-or medium-security prison, such as La Ceja. Caramagna said the ex-paras felt betrayed by the President's decision to transfer them to Itagui since it undermined GOC peace process commitments. Caramagna described maximum security Itagui prison as dark, crowded, and dank. Now more than ever, he said, "the GOC has the upper-hand on the former paramilitaries, who are even more vulnerable than before."

13. (C) Caramagna said that of the 59 ex-paramilitary members transferred from La Ceja to Itagui, only 14 were major paramilitary leaders. The rest were assistants or mid-level members. The ex-paras were divided into two groups, with a

moderate group led by Ramon Isaza and Salvatore Mancuso trying to preserve the peace process, and a larger, more radical group led by Ivan Roberto Duque (AKA "Ernesto Baez") and Carlos Mario Jimenez, (AKA "Macaco"), emphasizing the process was over.

14. (C) Caramagna said a majority of the ex-paras in Itagui were former mid-level members who served under Macaco in the Central Bolivar Bloc (BCB). Macaco, who has more followers with him than the other para leaders in Itagui, has been able to intimidate other ex-paras and expand his influence over other inmates. Caramagna heard Macaco was giving out promissory notes ("vales") that carried monetary value outside of Itagui to "trustworthy" inmates. Caramagna was concerned that if Macaco were to stay in Itagui for more than six months, he would end up controlling the maximum-security prison from within.

15. (C) Caramagna said Salvatore Mancuso was alone and feared for his life and that of his family. He said Mancuso acted strong around the other ex-paras, but when he met with him alone, Mancuso turned into "a scared little boy." Caramagna said Mancuso was close to having a nervous breakdown; he wanted to confess all of his crimes, but was afraid to do so. Mancuso had compared himself to former paramilitary leader Carlos Castano, who was killed by his colleagues when they suspected he was going to tell the truth about the group to the U.S. Mancuso was concerned other ex-paras thought he planned to do the same. A month before Castano was killed, some of his family members were murdered. Caramagna said Mancuso told him several of his family members, including his child, had recently received threats.

16. (C) Caramagna said former paramilitary leader Diego Murillo (AKA "Don Berna") was trying to bring the two ex-paramilitary sides together to maintain unity, and OAS regional observers told Caramagna Don Berna's people in Medellin had received a holiday card from him telling them how important it was to continue to support the peace process. Don Berna was also mediating between the ex-paramilitaries and other illegal armed group members (IAGs) held in Itagui. Caramagna described a three-hour long meeting he had with Don Berna in his jail cell. Don Berna was accompanied by former EPL leader Francisco Caraballo and ELN negotiator Juan Carlos Cuellar. Caramagna described the meeting as "surreal," with the two far-left guerrillas and a far-right paramilitary giving their individual analysis of why the violence in Colombia has lasted so long. Caramagna said, "They were talking in such harmony, it was simply amazing." He added, "This is what two years of companionship in prison does."

Door Half Open for Continued Peace Talks

17. (C) Caramagna noted that since the ex-paramilitary leaders called off the peace process on December 6, the OAS, with the help of the Catholic Church and Antioquia's Peace Facilitator Commission, had continued to meet them to try to revive the process. The ex-paras claimed the GOC had failed to meet its commitments including: (1) incarceration in a low-or medium-security prison; (2) compliance with the Justice and Peace Law; and (3) an offer of political status for the ex-paramilitary leaders. Caramagna told them the GOC was not the only side to break the agreement. He had cited four instances where the paras had failed to keep their part of the bargain: (1) the killing of Carlos Castano; (2) the kidnapping of a cattle rancher in Cesar; (3) the killing of a departmental legislator; and (4) repeated breaches of the cease-fire. He said the MAPP/OAS had not highlighted these incidents to prevent the peace process from collapsing. Caramagna added that several ex-paras had told him privately they were ready to tell the truth under the Justice and Peace Law, but needed better GOC security guarantees.

WOOD

=====CABLE ENDS=====